

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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VERA HIRSCHBERG

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JAPAN: QUANDARY IN INTERNATIONALISM

ANNCR:

A LITTLE MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE EMPEROR MEIJI ENDED CENTURIES OF JAPAN'S FEUDAL ISOLATION AND OPENED HIS NATION TO FOREIGN INFLUENCES. BUT THOSE LONG YEARS OF INSULARITY CONTINUE TO INFLUENCE JAPAN TODAY, INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD THAT DESPITE ITS NEW TRADE AGREEMENT WITH THE UNITED STATES, TOKYO WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ADJUST TO A MORE INTERNATIONALIST STANCE. VOA'S VERA HIRSHBERG HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

EARLIER THIS MONTH, ROBERT STRAUSS, PRESIDENT CARTER'S SPECIAL TRADE REPRESENTATIVE, AND NOBUHINKO USHIBA, JAPAN'S MINISTER OF EXTERNAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, CONCLUDED AN AGREEMENT TO END THE TRADE DISPUTE BETWEEN THEIR TWO NATIONS. THE ACCORD WAS DESIGNED TO LIBERALIZE JAPAN'S ECONOMIC TIES WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD AND TO REDUCE ITS HUGE SEVENTEEN THOUSAND MILLION DOLLAR TRADE SURPLUS -- ALMOST HALF OF WHICH IS WITH THE UNITED STATES. THE AGREEMENT INCLUDES PLEDGES BY THE JAPANESE FOR TARIFF CUTS, INCREASED IMPORTS, AND ECONOMIC STIMULUS TO BRING JAPAN'S GROWTH TO SEVEN PERCENT THIS YEAR IN ORDER TO SPUR IMPORT DEMAND. MISTER STRAUSS HAILED THE AGREEMENT AS "A CHANGE IN DIRECTION AND PHILOSOPHY" ON JAPAN'S PART. BUT MISTER USHIBA WAS MORE RESTRAINED, CALLING THE PACT "A TEMPORARY PAUSE." AND HE WARNED THAT NEW ECONOMIC ISSUES WILL ARISE AS A RESULT OF JAPAN'S NEW TRADE LIBERALIZATION EFFORTS AND WORLD RESPONSIBILITIES.

MISTER USHIBA'S CAUTION IS UNDERSTANDABLE. AS A WELL-TRAVELLED DIPLOMAT, HE IS AWARE THAT THE PACT WAS NECESSARY TO IMPROVE JAPAN'S STANDING IN THE WORLD COMMUNITY. HE IS ALSO AWARE THAT IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR MANY JAPANESE TO SWALLOW WHAT THEY BELIEVE ARE UNWARRANTED TRADE CONCESSIONS FORCED UPON THEM. FOR IN AN INCREASINGLY INTERDEPENDENT WORLD, JAPAN HAS TO A LARGE EXTENT REMAINED A NATION APART. IT IS A COMPLETE AND SELF-CONTAINED CIVILIZATION, WHERE EVERY FOREIGNER, REGARDLESS OF NATIONALITY, IS SINGLED OUT BY THE TERM "GAIJIN." IT IS A CIVILIZATION THAT HAS ABSORBED WESTERN TECHNOLOGY AND THE OUTWARD TRAPPINGS OF WESTERN CULTURE, BOTH HIGH AND LOW. BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT IS A CIVILIZATION WHICH BEARS WITNESS TO A PAST ISOLATED FOR CENTURIES FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD.

JAPAN'S REMARKABLE RENAISSANCE FROM THE ASHES OF WORLD WAR II TO THE THIRD MOST POWERFUL ECONOMY IN THE WORLD WAS DUE IN LARGE PART TO ITS NATIONAL TEAM SPIRIT -- A SPIRIT SOME JAPAN SCHOLARS VIEW AS UNPRECEDENTED NATIONAL CLANNISHNESS. BUT WHATEVER THE REASON, IT IS CLEAR THAT JAPAN'S POST WORLD WAR II ECONOMIC SUCCESS WAS ROOTED IN A PROTECTIONIST, SO-CALLED "JAPAN FIRST" TRADE POLICY. ACCESS TO CHEAP MARITIME TRANSPORTATION COMBINED WITH GOVERNMENT DIRECTION AND INVESTMENT LOAN POLICIES CREATED A THRIVING EXPORT ECONOMY. THAT ECONOMY IS POWERED BY AN ENERGETIC AND CONSCIENTIOUS WORK FORCE, MOST OF WHOM ARE GUARANTEED LIFETIME JOB SECURITY FROM THEIR PATERNALISTIC EMPLOYERS.

A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO, JAPAN RAN A TRADE SURPLUS IN PROPORTION TO ITS OVERALL ECONOMY OF ROUGHLY THE SAME SIZE AS TODAY. BUT, BECAUSE THE ECONOMY WAS LITTLE MORE

THAN A BAMBOO SHOOT, ITS EFFECTS ON THE WORLD WERE NEGLIGIBLE. BUT TODAY, THAT SHOOT HAS GROWN INTO A TOWERING STALK, NOURISHED IN JAPAN BY POWERFUL AGRICULTURAL INTERESTS, INDUSTRIAL GIANTS AND INCREASINGLY AFFLUENT CONSUMERS. WITH FEW NATURAL RESOURCES, IT IS AN ECONOMY THAT HAS BUILT AND SUSTAINED ITS SUCCESS ON MANUFACTURED EXPORTS AND A HEAVY ANTI-IMPORT BIAS.

NOW, LIKE IT OR NOT, THE JAPANESE, IN THE WORDS OF ONE OBSERVER, "HAVE BEEN" DRAGGED KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY." HOW RAPIDLY THEY WILL ASSUME THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES IN THIS COMMUNITY REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

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JS/RTD